

American Profile



Christmas Classics

The stories behind our favorite holiday movies and TV specials

INSIDE:

- Buster Brantall signs for Santa Claus
- Hansen Wheel crafts vintage vehicles
- Our Picks
- Prune cake recipe

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Ask American Profile

Q I saw a group called Celtic Woman on PBS and was captivated. Please tell me about them.

—Maria MacKay, Richmond, Ky.

The five young Irish women in the spellbinding group Celtic Woman mix traditional Irish tunes with timeless classics and contemporary numbers. Their new Christmas CD, *A Christmas Celebration*, features "O Holy Night," "Little Drummer Boy" and "Silent Night" alongside the St. Thomas Aquinas hymn "Panis Angelicus," the 12th-century Irish song "The Wexford Carol" and the traditional Celtic ballad "Don Oiche Ud I mBeithil." The group's self-titled 2005 debut CD spent 68 weeks at No.1 on the sales-based *Billboard* World Music Chart, setting a new record.



The performers in Celtic Woman mix traditional and contemporary songs.

Q I like *Dirty Jobs*, hosted by Mike Rowe. Could you tell me a little about him?

—Dee Arthur, West Baden Springs, Ind.

The multi-talented host of the Discovery Channel series *Dirty Jobs*—which takes him every week inside an occupation too icky for most people to undertake—has sung professionally with the Balt-

more Opera, appeared in several dozen Tylenol commercials, and hosted *Worst Case Scenario* for TBS, *The Most* for the History Channel, *No Relation* for Fox, *New York Expeditions* for PBS and *Evening Magazine* in San Francisco, where he resides. Rowe also has performed in dozens of theatrical productions and narrated more than 1,000 hours of other TV programs.

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Toby Keith Stars in *Broken Bridges*

Singer-songwriter Toby Keith made his acting debut in the first CMT Film, *Broken Bridges*, which opened this fall in theaters nationwide. Now CMT hosts the exclusive TV broadcast premiere of the movie, which also stars Kelly Preston, newcomer Lindsey Haun, Willie Nelson and Burt Reynolds, on Friday, Dec. 15 at 7 p.m. Central. Watch for the DVD release of *Broken Bridges* on Jan. 9, 2007!

Q We have always been fans of Don Stroud, but have not seen him in any movies or TV shows lately. The last time we saw him it looked as if he had an eye injury.

—Kathy Wright, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Actually, the prolific TV and movie actor, now 64, lost an eye one night in 1992 when he intervened in a mugging in New York City. "I stepped in to help and was stabbed six times," he recalls. "The eye I have now is false." Last year, Stroud retired and returned to Hawaii, where he grew up and started in show business as Troy Donahue's surf double in the 1960s TV series *Hawaiian Eye*. "I did over 100 movies and 250 television shows," says the actor, who often played villains or other unsavory characters. "People ask me what my favorite was, and all I can say is I'm proud that I did that much work."



Actor Don Stroud



JUST RELEASED...

Kellie Pickler is a 'Small Town Girl'

Only 20 years old, country newcomer Kellie Pickler went from Albemarle, N.C., to Hollywood, Calif., where she caught America's attention as a finalist on *American Idol*.

She co-wrote five of the songs on her new CD, *Small Town Girl*. "My Angel" is about her grandmother, who taught Pickler to be a dreamer. "You can't give up on your dreams, 'cause sometimes, that's all you have," she says.

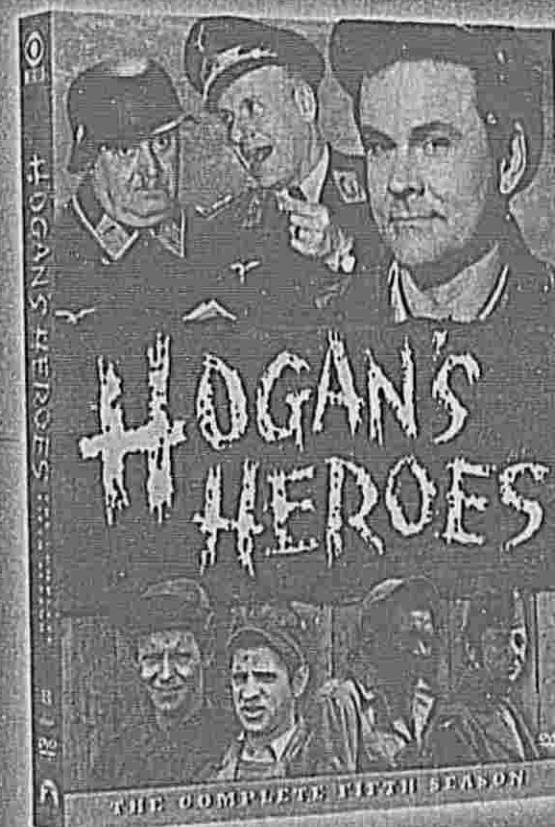
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Cover Story

When you ask people to name their favorite holiday films and shows, few cite recent releases. Instead, more than any other time of year, Christmas inspires movie fans to gravitate toward the classics that they first saw as children.

"It's like people eating their favorite foods—they're looking for a particular satisfaction, or some kind of feeling," says Kenneth Turan, film critic for the *Los Angeles Times*. "When they want that feeling, they go to that same film again."

And in the modern world, as the holidays grow increasingly commercial and chaotic, it can be a relief to bask in the simpler times portrayed in Hollywood's perennial favorites.

"These kinds of traditions are especially important now, when time moves so quickly," says Joel Siegel, entertainment editor for ABC's *Good Morning America*. "It's nice to step back."

While you'll undoubtedly revisit your favorite movies and TV specials this holiday season, you may find a gem you've overlooked in our roundup of classic Christmas films—and begin a new tradition!



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Christmas Classics

by KATIE DODD

It's a Wonderful Life

It's hard to imagine a time when this perennial Christmas favorite by Frank Capra wasn't an American classic. Though it failed miserably when released to theaters in 1946, the movie starring Jimmy Stewart found new life in the 1960s when shown on television. During a season steeped in family, customs and memories, the graceful, sentimental tale of a man who learns his life is far more valuable than he thought offers an especially moving message. "The notion that we're not appreciating our life is a very powerful one," Turan says. "And it's one that people seem to really want to take to heart."

Miracle on 34th Street

Twentieth Century Fox executive Darryl F. Zanuck felt this 1947 story set in Macy's department store at Christmas-time was far too corny, and insisted on a summer release to avoid losing too much money. Instead, audiences fell in love with the film starring Maureen O'Hara and an adorable 8-year-old Natalie Wood as a mother and daughter who learn the importance of faith. The film played packed theaters through Christmas. "I think people really want to believe in Santa Claus," Siegel says. "And what movie does it better?"

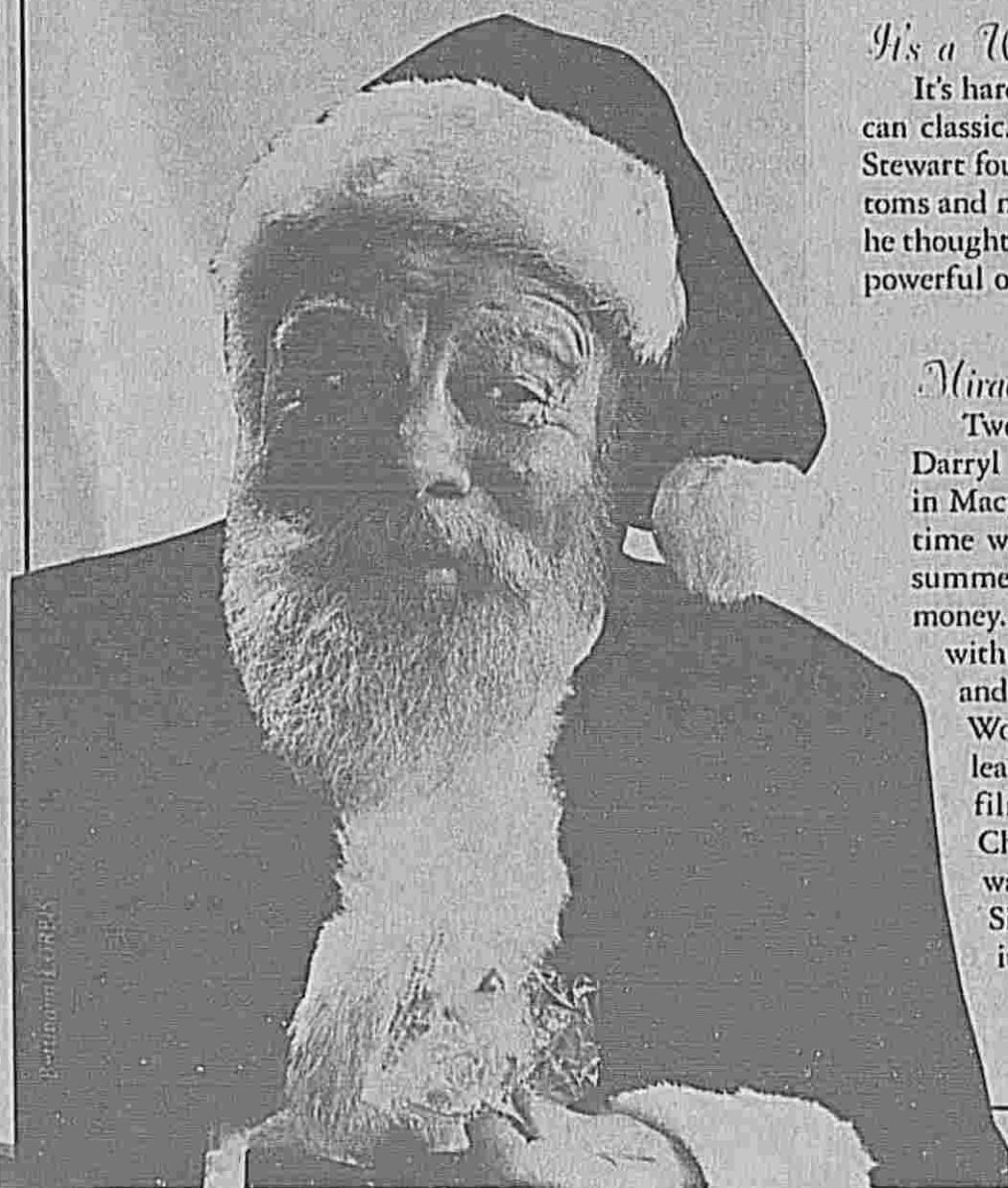


Stars Cary Grant, David Niven and Loretta Young

The Bishop's Wife

"Cary Grant is the angel of the piece and has never appeared to greater advantage," wrote *Variety* upon the release of this 1947 film based on Robert Nathan's novel. Grant provides much of the magic of the movie, a story about a bishop and his wife, played by David Niven and Loretta Young, whose plans to build a new cathedral are altered by divine intervention. Like many holiday favorites, the story demonstrates how easy it is to become consumed by the tangible, when it's the intangibles that truly count.

(Continued on page 6)



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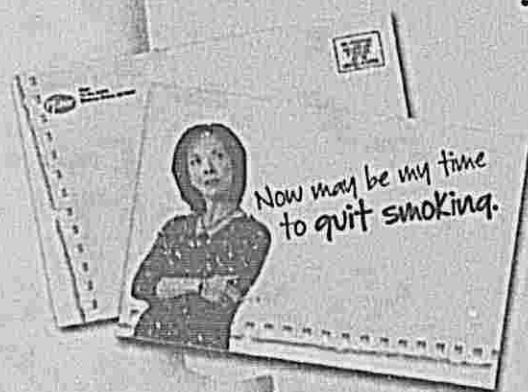
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(Continued from page 4)

What's
YOUR favorite
Christmas movie or
TV special? Tell us
about it online at
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The Grinch still steals hearts every Christmas.

How the Grinch Stole Christmas

When director Chuck Jones brought Dr. Seuss' beloved story to TV in 1966, he already had revolutionized Looney Tunes during his tenure as director of animation at Warner Bros. But the Grinch, voiced by Boris Karloff, is one of his most enduring characters. "The way Jones' characters were drawn, it was almost as if they were aware of the drama," says film and TV critic Matt Zoller Seitz. "There is a psychological depth to the Grinch that very few live action characters have."

The red-nosed reindeer finds favor with the boss in 1964's *Rudolph*.



CBS/Landov

A Christmas Story

This 1983 film also performed poorly in theaters, but now rivals *It's a Wonderful Life* for most popular holiday movie. Based on a book by Canadian humorist Jean Shepherd, the offbeat comedy details a young boy's all-consuming desire for a BB gun, undeterred by adults who repeatedly warn that he'll shoot his eye out. Using creative camera techniques—which often make adults seem like giants who speak a secret language—director Bob Clark tells the story through the eyes of his young lead character, Ralphie Parker. "It's an adult remembering what it was like to be a child at Christmas; it's really Christmas seen from the inside out," says Seitz. "And every kid can sympathize with wanting that one particular toy!"



Ho ho ho: Ralphie meets Santa in *A Christmas Story*

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer/Frosty the Snowman

Animation has evolved significantly in the past few decades, yet this pair of TV specials, produced in the 1960s by Jules Bass and Arthur Rankin Jr., continues to capture viewers' hearts. *Frosty*, a 1969 animated short film, features familiar voices such as Jimmy Durante and June Foray (best known as Rocky from "Rocky and Bullwinkle"), while 1964's *Rudolph* features the kind of hand-manipulated, stop-motion animation rarely seen in the age of computer-generated imagery. "You can't beat work that was made by human hands," Seitz says. "So much animation being done today wants to look real, and those specials are more like a children's storybook."



Peanuts creator Charles Schulz stood his ground with TV execs to keep a spiritual message in his Christmas special.

A Charlie Brown Christmas

When network executives heard the concept of the first Peanuts holiday special, they feared it was too contemplative, and lobbied for more laughs and less religion. But author Charles Schulz persisted, creating the film's most unforgettable scene: As the Peanuts' Christmas play comes to a close, Linus recites the Bible verse Luke 2: 8-14. "It complements *It's a Wonderful Life* in that Charlie Brown also feels like he doesn't belong," says Seitz, whose essay on the TV special was reprinted in a book celebrating its 35th anniversary. "It's really about the conflict between the temporary and the eternal—the temporary being the things you own and the eternal being much larger. Essentially, Charles Schulz made a film that said Christmas is about more than selling products."



Bing Crosby and Rosemary Clooney

White Christmas

"That song was unstoppable," Siegel says. Written for the 1942 film *Holiday Inn*, Bing Crosby's "White Christmas" was such a smash hit that it inspired this 1954 musical about a song-and-dance duo who set out to save a failing Vermont inn run by their former U.S. Army general. Patriotism, nostalgia, romance and top-notch musical numbers from Crosby, Rosemary Clooney, Danny Kaye and Vera Ellen make it an exuberant holiday favorite.

Bells of St. Mary's

Conventional wisdom says sequels are never as good as the original. But this 1945 follow-up to *Going My Way*, which also starred Bing Crosby as the affable Father O'Malley, proves otherwise, earning the first-ever Oscar nomination for a sequel. The film, which also stars Ingrid Bergman as a nun trying to save a struggling Catholic school, has only a handful of Christmas scenes, but its touching message about the joy of giving makes it ideally suited to the time of year.

A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens' tale of a gruff miser who gets a Christmas Eve wake-up call has been re-created countless times, owing to its universal story and vivid characters. The definitive version is the 1951 film starring Alastair Sim as Scrooge, but a version made for CBS in 1984 featuring George C. Scott is loved by many critics. Luckily for parents, there are also several ways to expose kids to the story's important lesson about charity, from 1992's *The Muppet Christmas Carol* to the animated *Mickey's Christmas Carol* from 1983. "Mickey's Christmas Carol is very sweet, and it's not afraid to be sentimental," Siegel says. "That's something that makes a great Christmas movie—it's not afraid to go right for the heart." ★

Katie Dodd is a writer in Nashville, Tenn.



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Hometown Hero

by KRISTEN TRIBE

Signing for Santa

Santa Claus sits in a plump, velvet chair in Plano, Texas, while children with gap-toothed grins, excited eyes and even a few tearful faces line up behind him. The children have never heard Santa's jolly "ho, ho, ho," and many have never sat in his lap to share a Christmas wish list. But this Santa's helper has a surprise. He knows sign language.

"When they notice I can sign, there's a glow that comes over their faces," says Buster Bramall, of Waxahachie, Texas (pop. 24,205), who has portrayed Santa for hearing impaired children for more than 30 years.

The opportunity for the kids to communicate directly with Santa is what makes the experience so special. In the past, many had to send messages to Santa through siblings or friends. Although Bramall is not hearing impaired, his parents were deaf, so he understands the children's frustrations.

"Before I learned to sign, if my daddy didn't understand



As Santa, Buster Bramall uses sign language to communicate with Arely Basurto, 7, as she shares her Christmas wish list.

something I was trying to tell him, he would say, 'Tell your sister,' (who knew how to sign)," Bramall says. "But I didn't want to tell my sister everything I wanted Daddy to know. It was like going through a third party."

Bramall, now 53, was in his 20s when he began playing Santa Claus for children in a deaf education program in Corsicana, Texas (pop. 26,014), and five years ago he also began appearing at The Shops at Willow Bend mall in Plano, Texas. Between the two locations, about 200 hearing impaired children shared their Christmas wishes with Bramall last year.

Speech therapist Sarah Gillette brought a group of 3- and 4-year-olds from the Mesquite Regional Day School for the Deaf to the Plano event. As each child left Santa's lap, she gave them high-fives and pats on the back. "The kids are used to being in places where people can't communicate with them, so to come here and have someone who can talk to them is really special," she says.

Stella Ashley of Dallas, a long-time friend of Bramall's, plays Mrs. Claus. Like Bramall, she is not hearing impaired, but her parents were deaf and she learned to sign as a child. As Mrs. Claus, she greets the children using sign language and finds out their names and what they want for Christmas, passing along the information

to Santa so he can greet each child personally.

Angel Rauls, 7, of Dallas, attends the Dallas Regional Day School for the Deaf and was excited to talk to Santa at the Plano mall. "I asked Santa for roller skates," she says. "If I get them, I'll probably skate with my friends, and I might be able to teach my younger brothers and sisters to skate."

Angel has a good grasp of sign language, but some children who are just learning to sign bring pictures of the toys they would like. No matter their signing skills, Bramall says communicating with the kids is not difficult, though sometimes their requests can be heartbreaking.

"One girl asked me for a mama and daddy," he says. "It's times like these that I almost lose it and have to breathe deep."

Bramall is a self-proclaimed emotional guy, but Ashley says his enthusiasm, sense of humor and love of children make him the perfect Santa. Those same qualities have guided Bramall's work for the past 18 years at the Lena Pope Home, an organization in Fort Worth, Texas, that aids struggling families and supports children in foster homes. Bramall is the director of properties and also founded a program that helps 18-year-olds acquire their first vehicle after being released from the foster care system.

Bramall says he "just tries to help out wherever he can," but sharing his creative energy enables him to give priceless gifts to those he meets at work or as Santa.

"As Santa, he's able to bring a certain amount of pleasure to these children, and he is very dedicated to whatever project or commitment he has made," Ashley says. "He's a hoot, and I just love him." ☆

Kristen Tribe is a writer in Decatur, Texas.



A delighted Lauren Bruce, 5, hugs Santa in Plano, Texas.

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Senior Citizens with Money in the Bank Should Read This Before It's Too Late

If you have worked hard all your life and managed to put away a nest egg, you might end up losing most of your life savings because of a defect in Medicare.

If you or your spouse suddenly become ill and require extended nursing home care...NO ONE will help you with the nursing home bills. Medicare won't and neither will your health insurance. By law you are responsible for the nursing home bills yourself. Only after you have used up virtually all of your money, will Medicaid step in. That's because Medicaid, like Welfare, only aids the poor. By some estimates, the average couple's life savings can be wiped out after only 13 weeks of nursing home care.

Rich people don't have to worry because they can afford super-expensive special nursing home insurance, while the poor are taken care of by Medicaid.

Now that just doesn't seem fair to working people with a lifetime of hard-earned savings. The system they have supported with tax dollars, seems to have forgotten them. Savings intended to provide security in retirement, or help for children, can quickly go up in smoke.

The fact is, if you don't know how to protect your assets, here's what can happen to you. By law, before Medicaid will pay nursing home bills, you may have to spend all your countable assets except \$2000 (or as low as \$1500 in some states). Countable assets mean not only money in checking and savings accounts...but also any funds in CD's, IRA's, Savings Bonds, Mutual Funds, stocks, whole life insurance, annuities and other types of investments, as well as most trust assets.

They can also take a vacation home or a second car. In

addition, (except for a small personal spending allowance and a health insurance payment allowance) your entire Social Security or pension check can be taken to cover nursing home expenses. What's more, if you are single or widowed, you can even lose your house.

According to the federal law called the Spousal Impoverishment Act, if one spouse requires extended nursing home care, the healthy spouse can be forced to surrender HALF of their combined countable assets. And if you have a sizeable estate, they can legally take MORE THAN HALF.

Is there anything you can do to stop this nightmare from happening to you? Yes. You are protected by law and can use several legal techniques to place your countable (or vulnerable) assets into the uncountable (or protected) category. The problem is, most people are not aware of their legal rights. Unfortunately, most people think Medicare will take care of them, so they unknowingly leave their assets vulnerable and in jeopardy.

Your legal rights and the many methods of protecting your money are now revealed in "How to Protect Your Financial Security." This financial self-defense manual tells you simple legal procedures for preserving your money and warns of pitfalls to avoid. Here is some of the valuable material you learn:

- Legal ways to turn countable (or vulnerable) assets into uncountable (or protected) assets
- How to protect your house from being sold to pay your nursing home bills
- How to protect a second car or vacation home

• If you give your money to your children without following these precise guidelines, a nursing home could get your money anyhow

• What you need to know about Living Trusts

• What lawyers never tell you about protecting your will

As a hard-working taxpayer, you have a legal right to protect your life savings for yourself, your spouse or your heirs. You don't have to be rich to have peace of mind. You just have to follow the easy steps outlined in "How to Protect Your Financial Security."

Although "How to Protect Your Financial Security" can easily save you thousands of dollars, the price is very reasonable. Right now, you can receive a special press run for only \$12.95 plus \$2.00 postage and handling. It is not available in any bookstore. It is only available through this special offer on a 90 day Money Back Guarantee. If you are dissatisfied in any way, just return it in 90 days for a full refund, no questions asked.

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Hometown Recipes

from MARY PRIETO

Prune Cake

"In 1966, my mother-in-law gave me this recipe. Friends, neighbors and family love it." ★

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RECIPE: Prune Cake

American Profile



Mary Prieto
Los Lunas, N.M.



Cake:

- 4 eggs
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 cup buttermilk
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon each nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon
- 1 cup bite-sized pitted prunes, chopped

Frosting:

- 1 cup sugar
- ¼ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ cup buttermilk
- 2 tablespoons butter
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Photo: David Damer
Styling: Mary Carter

1. Preheat oven to 350F. Grease and flour a 10-inch tube pan.
2. Beat eggs in a medium bowl. Add sugar and beat well. Mix in oil. In a small bowl, dissolve baking soda in buttermilk. Sift flour, salt, nutmeg, cloves and cinnamon. Add flour mixture alternately with buttermilk mixture to egg mixture. Fold in prunes.
3. Pour batter into pan and bake about 1 hour or until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean.
4. To prepare the frosting, combine sugar, baking soda, buttermilk, butter and salt in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla. Poke holes in cake with a fork or long toothpick and pour frosting over cake while both are still warm.

Tips From Our Test Kitchen:

Soak prunes briefly in boiling water so they can be chopped or torn apart easily by hand after they are drained and cooled. The baking powder causes the icing to foam while cooking.

Holiday Gift Guide



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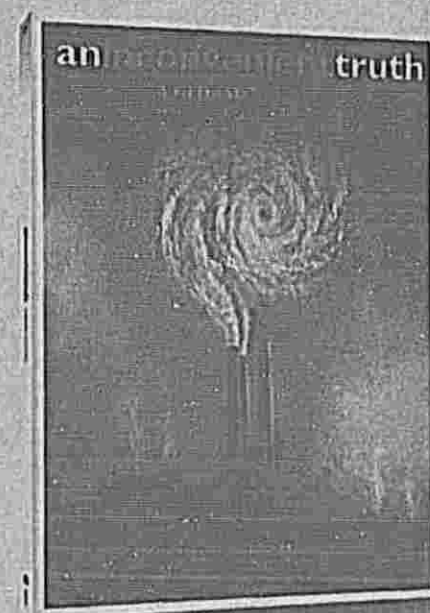


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The Most Talked-About Film Of The Year

On DVD November 21, Al Gore presents the state of global warming in **An Inconvenient Truth**, with all-new updates. Visit www.climatecrisis.net for information.

Our Picks

HOLIDAY GIFT Guide

Here are some recommended DVDs, books and CDs—something for everyone on your Christmas shopping list!



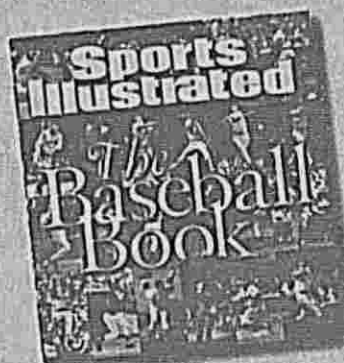
Johnny Cash— At San Quentin CD/DVD

Originally released as a hit album, the Man in Black's historic 1969 concert has been masterfully re-packaged as a double CD with 12 originally unreleased tracks—including several by the other acts who also appeared, The Statler Brothers, Carl Perkins and The Carter Family—plus a one-hour DVD of a seldom-seen British TV documentary filmed during the show at California's notorious penitentiary. Cash went on to play for larger audiences as he ascended to superstardom, but as the rowdy, roaring cheers from the "captive audience" make clear, it's doubtful he ever played for a more appreciative one.



Greetings From E Street: The Story of Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band By Robert Santelli Hardcover, 98 pages

Covering 35 rollercoaster years of "the Boss" and his band, who gave the world classic songs such as "Born in the U.S.A." and "Glory Days," this photo-packed scrapbook also contains two posters, handwritten set lists and an early Springsteen business card that make this a deluxe package of rock 'n' roll nostalgia.



Sports Illustrated: The Baseball Book

Edited by Rob Fleder

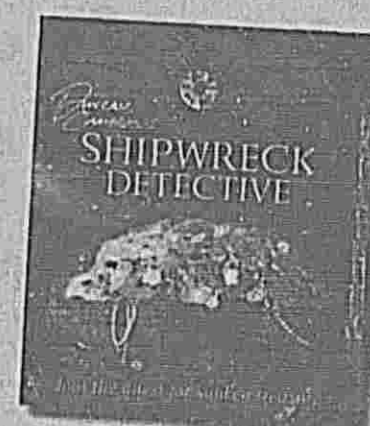
Hardcover, 294 pages

The World Series is history, the dust of the diamond has settled and the outfield grass is sleeping through the winter. This collection of spectacular images of players, jaw-dropping plays and a century's worth of other memorable moments—captured by the world's leading sports photographers—will help fans of all ages keep the baseball flame burning until next season's opening game.



LIFE: 70 Years of Photography By the editors of Life Hardcover, 304 pages

For most of the 20th century, *Life* set the gold standard for photojournalism with powerful, unforgettable images of history and humanity. This handsome coffee-table collection of celebrities, children, wars and the rhythms of life in America will bring smiles, tears and a new sense of appreciation for the world in which we live.



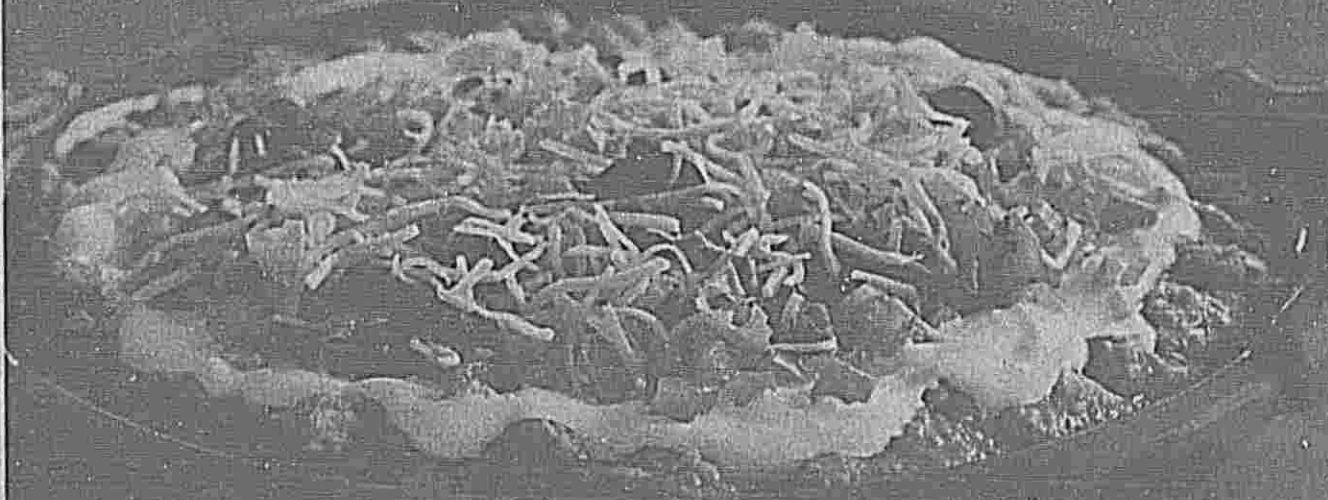
Shipwreck Detective Created and illustrated by Duncan Cameron; written by Richard Platt Hardcover, 96 pages

Mixing fact, fiction, exquisitely detailed illustrations and more than 20 different interactive doodads (a compass, dive log, charts, flaps and other surprises), this hardy treasure chest of a book submerges readers of all ages on a quest to solve a delightfully engaging mystery of the ocean deep leading to a cache of gold hidden inside Davy Jones' locker.

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Prep: 10 minutes Makes 48 servings, about 2 Tbsp. each

- 1 can (16 oz.) refried beans
- 1 Tbsp. taco seasoning mix
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- 1 cup salsa
- 1 cup shredded lettuce
- 1 cup KRAFT Mexican Style Shredded Cheese
- 1/2 cup chopped green onions
- 2 Tbsp. sliced pitted ripe olives

MIX beans & taco seasoning mix. Spread onto bottom of 9-inch pie plate.

LAYER remaining ingredients over bean mixture; cover. Refrigerate several hours or until chilled.

SERVE with tortilla chips or assorted crackers.



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DEC. 18-
JAN. 7

Happenings

ILLINOIS

Festival of Lights—Rockford, through Dec. 31. Marvel at more than 50 light displays, the Rockford Community Holiday Tree and the Woodward Governor's holiday display Wednesdays through Sundays in Sinnissippi Park. (800) 521-0849.

INDIANA

Christmas at the Castle—Santa Claus, through Dec. 23. Explore the history of the town, visit with Santa Claus, and sample confections and candy canes at the restored Candy Castle. (812) 544-3900.

IOWA

ArtLife Society's Small Works Show—Fairfield, through Jan. 7. View 280 original works by 100 national and international artists during this fifth annual event at Emerald Gallery. (641) 472-8135.

KANSAS

A Very Fifties Christmas—Shawnee, through Dec. 31. Rock around the aluminum Christmas tree and learn how the holidays were celebrated in the 1950s suburbs in the All-Electric House at the Johnson County Museum. (913) 715-2550.

MICHIGAN

Wonderland of Lights—Lansing, through Dec. 31. Delight in lighted sculptures resembling lions, bears and other animals, and enjoy supper in the Toy House Café at Potter Park Zoo. (517) 702-4730.

MINNESOTA

Folkways of the Holidays—Shakopee, through Dec. 31. Celebrate the holiday season with a visit to the 1800s Eagle Creek village and enjoy horse-drawn trolley rides, a tour of homes and folk art performances on Saturdays and Sundays. (763) 694-7784.

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MISSOURI

Run for the Ranch—Springfield, Dec. 31. Put on your running shoes for 5K, 10K, half-marathon and marathon races beginning at Trinity Lutheran Church. Proceeds go to the Good Samaritan Boys Ranch in Brighton. (417) 836-6685.

NEBRASKA

Christmas at Cody's—North Platte, Dec. 20-23. Enjoy an old-fashioned Christmas with roasted chestnuts, stories, carolers, holiday music and tour of Buffalo Bill's home at Buffalo Bill State Historical Park. (308) 535-8035.

NORTH DAKOTA

First Night—Grand Forks, Dec. 31. Ring in the New Year during this alcohol-free festival featuring music, dance, comedy and magic performers, and a fireworks display in the downtown area. (218) 230-4231.

OHIO

Team Up! Explore Science and Sports—Dayton, through Dec. 31. This interactive exhibit at the Boonshoft Museum of Discovery combines sports and science, letting you test your skills in baseball, basketball, tennis, soccer and snowboarding to learn about geometry, physics, friction and force. (937) 275-7431.

SOUTH DAKOTA

Walk in the Park: History of Farm Island—Pierre, Jan. 6. Walk the trails and learn about the history of the area from the 1800s to the present at Farm Island Recreation Area. (605) 773-2885.

WISCONSIN

Christmas Illuminary—Monticello, Dec. 24-25. Follow a pathway lit with more than 500 candles to view a Nativity scene at Montesian Gardens. (608) 938-4383.

Read more Happenings at
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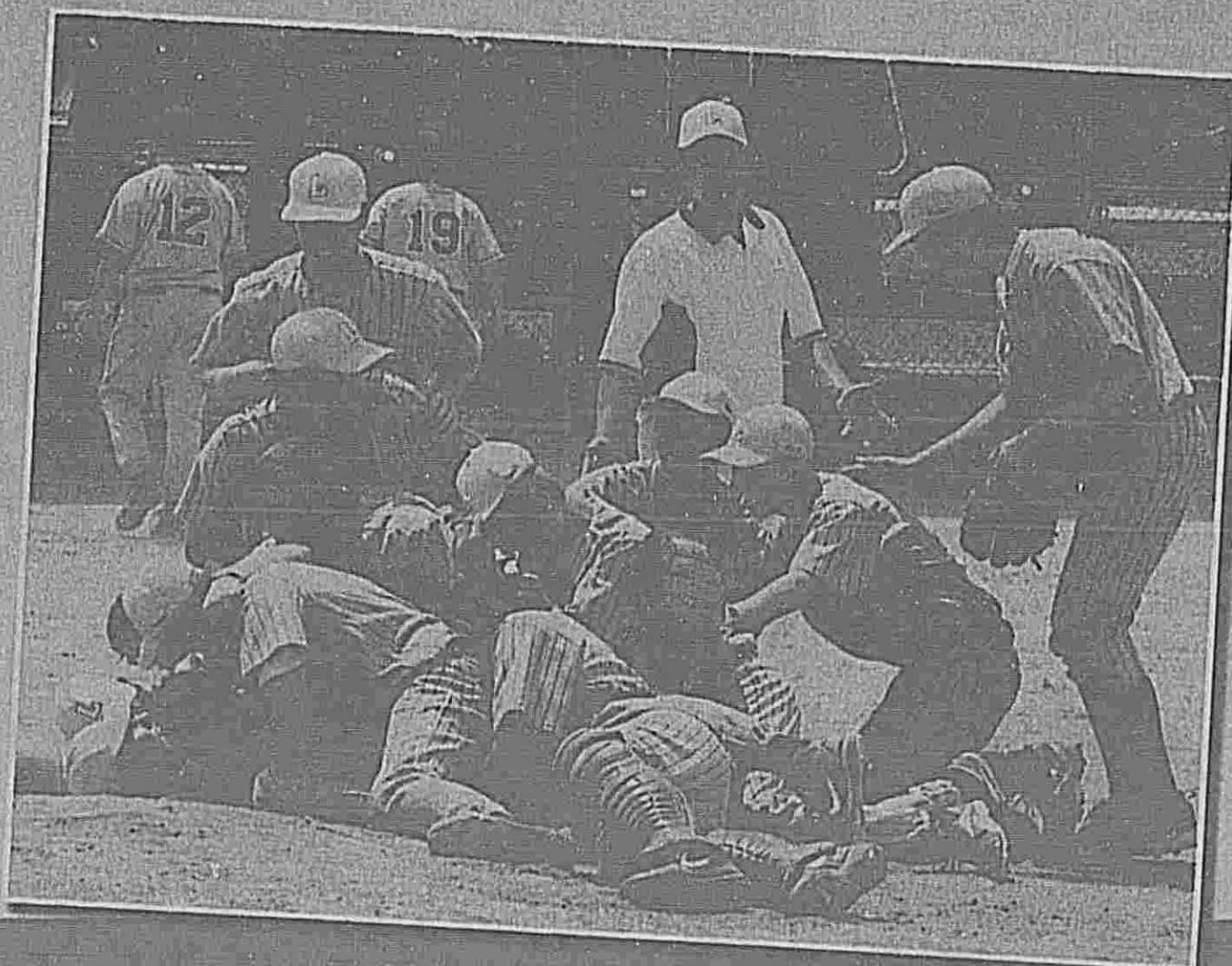
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Minting the Nation's Money

by TRACY
LEINBERGER-LEONARDI

To establish a mint in America, it took a revolution and an act of Congress.

In the mid-1600s, currency in America was scarce and colonists unsuccessfully petitioned King Charles I of England to create their own mint. When Civil War broke out and England ousted the king in 1649, Boston citizens took advantage of the lull in leadership and created their own currency—the Pine Tree Shilling—minted in 1652. Even as a new king was seated in 1667, Bostonians continued to secretly make their shilling.

It wasn't until the American Revolution ended that Americans were able to freely create their own currency. Unfortunately, each state was producing its own unique money, which led to widespread monetary confusion. In 1775, North Carolina alone had 17 different forms of money.

Finally in 1782, Robert Morris, who headed America's newly formed finance department, presented Congress with a plan for their new country's coins. Congress embraced the idea and instructed Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton to create a plan for a national mint. Ten years later, on April 2, 1792, President George Washington approved the plan.

The Mint, built in Philadelphia, was the first federal structure erected in the United States under the Constitution. In March 1793, 11,178 copper U.S. cents rolled out of the Mint with a value of \$111.78. Gold and silver coins soon would follow.

Today, the United States Mint, which makes more coins and medals than any other mint in the world, operates six facilities: its headquarters in Washington, D.C., and mints in Philadelphia, Denver, San Francisco, West Point, N.Y., and the U.S. Bullion Depository in Fort Knox, Ky. The U.S. Mint produces billions of regular and commemorative coins, including coins for other countries, and medals of great honor and distinction. On a typical day, the U.S. Mint produces 30 million coins worth about \$1 million.

Free tours are offered at both the Philadelphia and Denver mints, where curious visitors can see firsthand how coins are made and learn the amazing history of the U.S. Mint.

Tracy Leinberger-Leonardi is a writer in Elkton, Md.

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by CHUCK CECIL

Wheelwright Tim Hoffman pours water on a hot rim of steel and momentarily disappears in a billowy cloud of steam at Hansen Wheel & Wagon Shop in Letcher, S.D. (pop. 160).

"We don't use glue or nails to hold the spoke to the wheel, so the shrinking steel pulls everything up tightly for a strong bond," says Hoffman, 31, who has been perfecting the art of wooden wheel making for six years.

After the hot steel rims shrink and cool, the wheels are painted and mounted on the 50 or so horse-drawn stagecoaches and other vintage wagon replicas that roll out of the shop each year.

Owner Doug Hansen, 47, started the business in 1978 after spending his teen years fixing broken wagon wheels and repairing dilapidated buggies.

"My mom and granddad really got me started," says Hansen, who

Doug Hansen

learned woodworking and blacksmithing at Mitchell (S.D.) High School and the nearby Mitchell Technical Institute. "She brought home an old broken-down buggy, and then my granddad bought a span of mules and said he needed a wagon."

Hansen became so proficient at making wheels and wagons that his grandfather suggested he start the business.

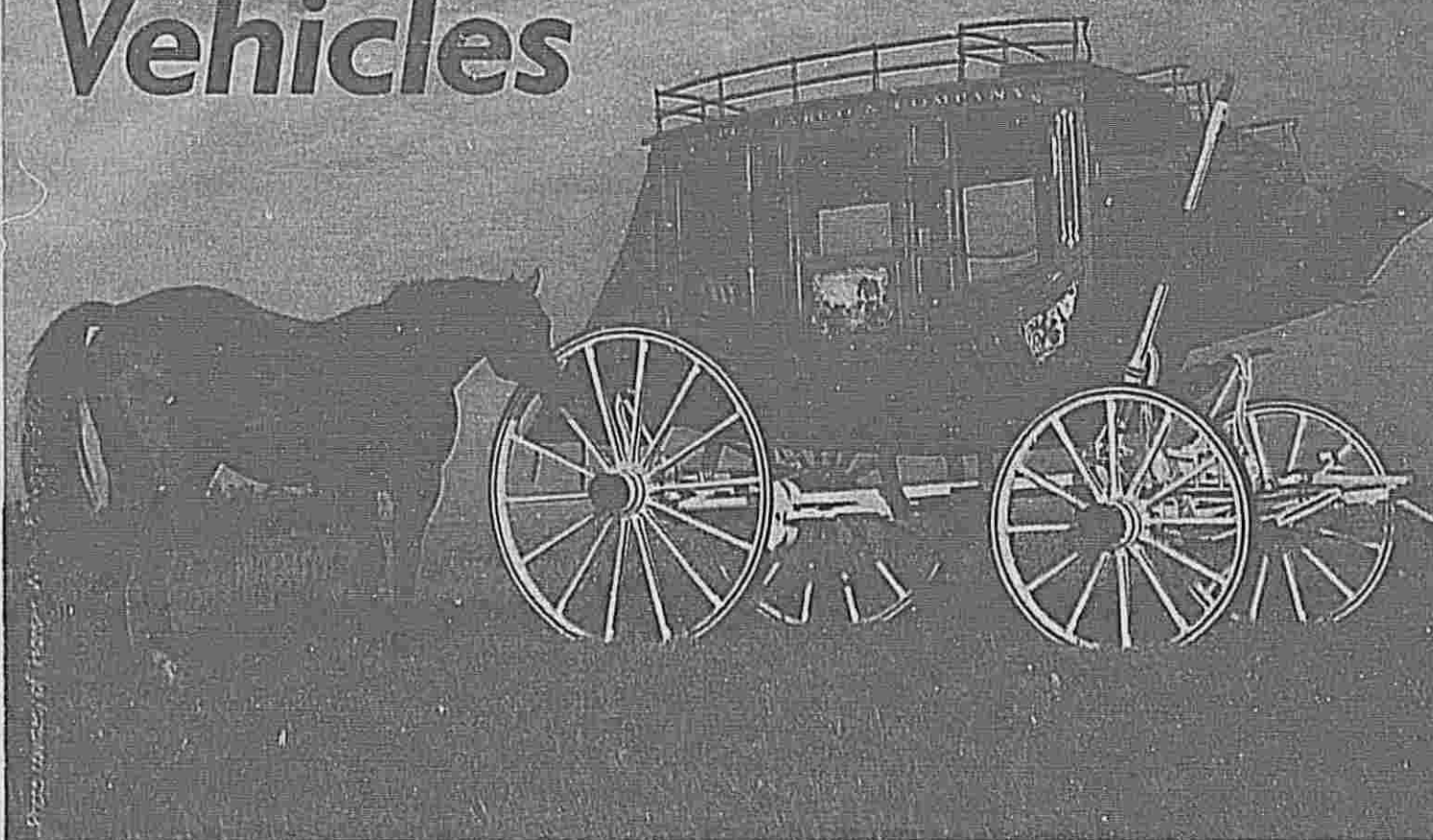
During the last 28 years, Hansen Wheel & Wagon has made about 10,000 wooden wheels and 13,000 wagons of all kinds, from reproductions of 19th-century stagecoaches to wagons used as living quarters by shearherders.

Hansen's business has grown because of a renewed interest in the Old West. "People have moved from the farm to the city, but have a longing for the past," he says. "It's a nostalgia thing."

To build authentic replicas, Hansen and his



Dale Michel fits the wooden door on a replica of an 1880s, nine-passenger Western-style stagecoach.



Horse-drawn conveyances, such as this luxury stagecoach, are built by Hansen Wheel & Wagon in Letcher, S.D.

wife, Holly, travel to farms, museums and other places where antique wagons are used or displayed, sketching and measuring every piece of the old originals. He has dozens of notebooks with handwritten details on all kinds of Old West rolling stock, from chuck wagons to prairie schooners.

From his sketches, Hansen and his shop's 10 craftsmen—wainwrights, wheelwrights, blacksmiths, coach makers, carpenters, pinstripe painters and upholsterers—build wagons as they were made in the 1800s, using square nails or handcrafted bolts when required.

Hansen's shop is known for fine craftsmanship in refurbishing or making new wheels and wagons from ash, oak and hickory wood. Wagons made at the shop range in price from \$9,000 to \$80,000, depending on how elaborate and labor-intensive the project.

The shop's authentic reproductions are sought around the world. Hansen has sent a replica chuck wagon to Japan and a sheep wagon to France, while Western-style wagons are favorites among cowboy wannabes in Germany.

Hansen wagons have appeared in movies, including *Dances With Wolves*, and in television commercials, such as the Budweiser beer wagons drawn by Clydesdale horses. Wells Fargo Bank uses a dozen Hansen-made stagecoaches for advertising and promotion, while Hansen wagons can be found on display in museums and Western-theme restaurants, and driven by participants in draft horse competitions.

Hansen's most unusual order was for a wagon wheel 18 feet in diameter for the 2003 Warner Brothers movie *Looney Tunes Back In Action*.

In 2001, operators of the Booth Western Art Museum of Cartersville, Ga., asked Hansen to refurbish a historic stagecoach donated to the museum. "We wanted the coach to look old and used, but still be in very good condition," says Seth Hopkins, the museum's executive director. "We were thrilled with the results."

Hansen is a perfectionist and keeps a watchful eye on the tiniest construction details. He and his craftsmen enjoy the challenge of continuing the almost lost art of wheel and wagon making, and they're reluctant to deviate from methods used in the 1800s to make the durable horse-drawn conveyances.

"To my way of thinking," says Hansen, "whatever we do here—whatever leaves here—we give it our best; and you can be sure that the next time we do it, we'll do it even better." ☆

Chuck Cecil is a freelance writer in Brookings, S.D.

Visit www.hansenwheel.com or call (605) 996-8754 for more information.

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*The Wave[®] music system
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